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1 Piedras Blancas Profile

Designating Authority

Designating Authority: Public Law 110-229

Date of Designation: May 8, 2008

Acreage

Total Acres in Unit	20
BLM Acres	20
Other Federal Acres	0
State and Private Acres*	456

*State and Private acres are not part of the total of the unit acres

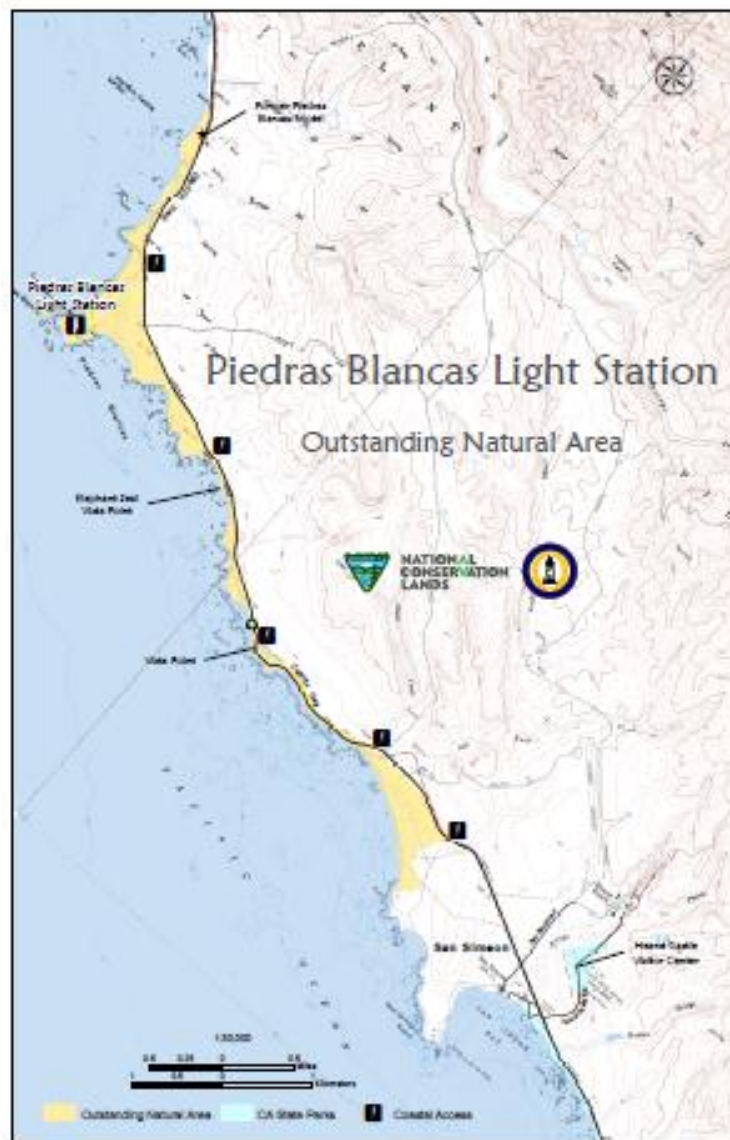
Contact Information

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Field Office Name	Bakersfield
District Office Name	Central California
State Office Name	California

Budget

Total Fiscal Year 2014 Budget	\$741,000
Subactivity 1711	\$281,000
Other Subactivities' Contributions	\$461,000
Other Funding	\$0

Map of Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area



The Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area is 476 acres managed through a partnership with California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Bureau of Land Management. The Outstanding Natural Area includes coastal landscape along 6 miles of scenic California State Highway 1 and encompasses the entire Piedras Blancas Northern Elephant Seal Rookery, the largest mainland rookery for the species.

Managing Partners

Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area is managed as a partnership between California Department of Parks and Recreation and the Bureau of Land Management. The adjacent tidal zones are managed by Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, California Department of Parks and the Bureau of Land Management.

Staffing

Operations are accomplished by volunteer help, particularly in the areas of visitor services and non-native plant eradication. Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area has a staff of two BLM employees: Park Manager (GS-0025-12) and Recreation Planer (GS-0099-04) . Additional administrative support is obtained from the BLM Bakersfield Field Office when available. In recent years visitation has increased substantially at Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area while volunteer help has diminished. A reevaluation of goals and objectives for the Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area should be accomplished to determine what can realistically be achieved with current resources available on an annual basis.



2 Planning and NEPA

Status of the Resource Management Plan

The Piedras Blancas Light Station Management Plan and Environmental Assessment serves as the unit's Resource Management Plan (RMP) and was completed and approved in 2007. This plan applies to the 20 acres of Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Piedras Blancas Light Station Management Plan and Environmental Assessment is being implemented as intended with emphasis on historic restoration, public visitation and scientific research.

The remaining 456 acres within the Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area is managed in accordance with the CA Dept of Parks and Recreation San Luis Obispo Coast District General Management Plan.

The Bakersfield Field office signed their RMP in December of 2014 which includes an appendix with all decision made regarding the Biedras Blancas ONA.

Status of Activity Plans

Piedras Blancas Interpretation Plan– This plan is completed and outlines themes and subthemes for tours conducted at the Piedras Blancas Light Station.

Piedras Blancas Educational Outreach Plan - This plan is completed and outlines the California State Educational Standards used in the student outreach activities at Piedras Blancas Light Station.

Piedras Blancas Business Plan– This plan is outdated and is no longer applicable. A new business plan needs to be drafted.

Status of the RMP Implementation Strategy

As per the Piedras Blancas Light Station Management Plan and Environmental Assessment, historic restoration, public visitation and scientific research are being implemented as planned.

Key National Environmental Policy Act Actions and/or Project Authorizations

There were no NEPA actions at the Piedras Blancas Light Station in fiscal year 2014.

3 Year's Projects and Accomplishments

General Accomplishments

Fog Signal Building Stabilization

Stabilization has begun on the Fog signal building. The foundation was stabilized and the seismic retrofit is planned for the near future

School Tours

Twenty classes of 4th grade students participated in the program which includes a classroom presentation and a field trip to Piedras Blancas Light Station. The field trip consists of a series of activities that correspond to the California State Standards in the areas of investigation and experimentation, life sciences, history and social sciences while emphasizing the theme of resource stewardship. Total number of participants exceeded 600 students.

Regular tours

Regular scheduled public tours took place at the Piedras Blancas Light Station throughout the year. Tours are scheduled every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday September through May and everyday but Sunday June through August. A total of 8,150 visitors took advantage of our tours. Tours focus on the historic aspects of the Piedras Blancas Light Station and the native history of the coastal area. Tours are two hours in length and are conducted by volunteers. Due to the restricted access of the light station visitors must attend guided scheduled tours and cannot visit the light station during any other time.

Water Tower

The water tower has been completed and the transfer of the communication equipment from the old tower to the water tower is underway. Every effort is being made to minimize the visual component of the communication equipment.

CCT

The California Coastal trail (CCT) is still a work in progress. There has been a steering committee developed to help move the project along. It is a complicated project because there are multiple regulatory agencies involved with many sensitive resources affected.

Ongoing youth volunteer projects

UCSB BREN Graduate School, CCC, Cuesta Community continue to send groups out for educational / volunteer excursions. This has been a great asset for the lighthouse not only to get some much needed work done but it is helping foster the next generation of stewards of our public land.

Current Areas of Focus

There are increasing incidents of harassment by visitors to the Northern elephant seals. Thousands of visitors come each year to view these marine mammals. Several breeding beaches lack formal viewing areas or interpretive signage and visitors often approach too closely to the seals causing stampeding. There is also a system of unwanted trails developing from the visitors causing accelerated erosion especially along the coastal bluffs. The section of the California Coastal Trail will help with the trail proliferation on the bluffs and help keep visitor off the beach where they occasionally harass wildlife.

There are many days during the tour when we are at capacity on our site. We only have parking for approx. 20 vehicles on site and all of our tour originate from another location. The vehicles have to caravan down a very busy one lane highway which can be dangerous at times. We are in the process of reevaluating this process to better suit the visitor and possible increase the number of visitors that can come out the Light Station. One of the solutions could be bussing the tours from the offsite location or improving the ingress and egress and increasing parking on site.

Education, Outreach, and Interpretation

For the fifth straight year the Piedras Blancas Student Educational Outreach Program was successfully implemented. Twenty classes of 4th grade students participated in the program which includes a classroom presentation and a field trip to Piedras Blancas Light Station. The field trip consists of a series of activities that correspond to the California State Standards in the areas of investigation and experimentation, life sciences, history and social sciences while emphasizing the theme of resource stewardship. Total number of participants exceeded 600 students.

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Partnerships

California Department of Fish and Game-Utilized Piedras Blancas as an educational site for Marine Protected Areas

California Highway Patrol- Utilized the Piedras Blancas communication tower, sought funding for new tower

California Polytechnic State University, Cal Poly – Provided technical assistance on various projects

California State Parks- Provided emergency response and co-managed Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area

California State University Santa Barbara – Utilized Piedras Blancas as a research site for intertidal studies

California State University Santa Cruz - Utilized Piedras Blancas as a research site for intertidal studies

Central Coast Lighthouse Keepers Association – Donated materials and published Piedras Blancas related news

County of San Luis Obispo – Maintained and utilized the Piedras Blancas communication tower

Cuesta Community College- Assisted with non-native plant removal, produced interpretive displays.

Friends of the Elephant Seal – Distributed Piedras Blancas printed information, promoted lighthouse tours, supported expansion of the ONA and CA Coastal Trail.

Friends of the Lens – Maintained Piedras Blancas Fresnel lens, promoted lighthouse tours

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary-Distributed Piedras Blancas information, promoted lighthouse tours, supported expansion of the ONA and CA Coastal Trail

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration –Utilized Piedras Blancas for Pacific jet-stream weather studies

National Weather Service- Utilized Piedras Blancas for weather data collection

Piedras Blancas Light Station Association- Raised money for restoration through memberships, sales and events. Supported expansion of the ONA and CA Coastal Trail

Piedras Blancas Volunteers – Performed operational, maintenance and resource restoration work

Point San Luis Light Station– Distributed Piedras Blancas printed information, promoted lighthouse tours

Point Sur Light Station– Distributed Piedras Blancas printed information, promoted lighthouse tours

Point Pinos Light Station– Distributed Piedras Blancas printed information, promoted lighthouse tours

San Simeon Chamber of Commerce– Distributed Piedras Blancas printed information, promoted lighthouse tours. Supported expansion of the ONA and CA Coastal Trail

Sierra Club- Assisted with non-native plant removal and native plant re-vegetation

Southwest Fisheries Science Center- Utilized Piedras Blancas as a research site for monitoring gray whales

Student Conservation Association- Assisted with non-native plant removal and native plant re-vegetation

United States Geological Survey- Utilized Piedras Blancas as a research site for monitoring seismic activity

United States National Park Service – Assisted with the historic restoration of buildings

Western Ecological Research Center- Utilized Piedras Blancas as a research site for sea otters and elephant seals



Volunteers

Much of the operations associated with Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area are volunteer driven. Last year volunteers provided tours to 8,150 visitors at Piedras Blancas Light Station. This represents about an 8% increase in visitation over the previous year. Last year volunteer hours decreased approximately 6% from the previous year to 9,642 hours of service. Volunteerism has shifted from Support services to education and interpretation because we need the help with the increase in visitors. Support Services volunteer hours dropped by over 50% last year. It will be a priority to increase the volunteerism in the support services category next year.

Volunteer Hours by Category

Category	Hours
Biological	1,962
Cultural	5
Support Services	2,566
Interpretation	5,109
Total	9,642

Land (or Interests in Land) Acquisitions

There were no land acquisitions or interests in lands activities for Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area completed in fiscal year 2014.



4 Science

Science

Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area is historically an important area for scientific research. The following research projects were conducted during 2013.

1) National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) North Eastern Pacific Gray Whale Annual Calf/Cow Population Census -NOAA Southwest Fisheries personnel conduct visual census of migrating North Eastern Pacific Gray Whale calf/cow pairs to determine the reproduction and health of the population. The annual count has been taking place at Piedras Blancas for nearly 20 years. Research is ongoing and will continue in the future. BLM contributes to logistics of the study.

2) United States Geological Survey (USGS) California Sea Otter Annual Population Census & Mortalities Study—USGS personnel conduct visual counts and radio telemetry studies of California sea otters to determine the total population and causes of mortality. Sea otter studies have been conducted at Piedras Blancas for over 25 years. Research is ongoing and will continue in the future. BLM contributes to logistics of the study.

3) United States Geological Survey (USGS) Annual Northern Elephant Seal Census- USGS personnel conduct visual counts of the Northern Elephant Seals at Piedras Blancas to determine the population at the Piedras Blancas rookery and the Northern Elephant Seal total population. Elephant Seals have been studied at Piedras Blancas for over 20 years. Research is ongoing and will continue in the future. BLM contributes to logistics of the study.

4) Partnership for Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans (PISCO) Coastal Environment Study- Research biologists from University of California at Santa Cruz and Santa Barbara conduct long term research at Piedras Blancas tide pools to determine the health of the intertidal coastal environment in regards to pollution and human activity. The tide pools and coastal environment at Piedras Blancas has been studied for over 10 years. Research is ongoing and will continue in the future. BLM contributes to logistics of the study.

5) United States Geological Survey (USGS) Seismic/Plate Tectonic Studies- USGS personnel place equipment and collect data on seismic movement at Piedras Blancas to trace and predict earthquake occurrence and magnitude. Research is ongoing. BLM contributes to logistics of the study.

6) National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Pacific Jet-stream Weather Studies- NOAA National Weather Service personnel conduct seasonal data collection to determine weather patterns as related to precipitation and future water availability. The principal investigator is NOAA employee Clark King. Research is ongoing and will continue in the future. BLM contributes to logistics of the study.

5 Resources, Objects, Values, and Stressors

Historical Resources

Historic buildings and structures, and Piedras Blancas Light Station.

Historical Resources Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Fair	Downward

Historical Resources Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY14
476	476	5	5

Stressors Affecting Historical Resources

Historic buildings and structures are exhibiting accelerated deterioration due to a lack of current and backlogged maintenance. The harsh marine environment is unforgiving and without regular maintenance the buildings will require very expensive repairs.

Prehistoric Resources

Native American sites

Prehistoric Resources Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Fair	Downward

Prehistoric Resources Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY14
476	476	150	20

Stressors Affecting Prehistoric Resources

Native American sites are being damaged due to unregulated visitor access and a lack of

administrative protection. These sites are mostly middens and occur over several areas where visitors are permitted to free roam. A formal trail system that circumvents the sites and interpretive outreach would help in the protection of these sites.

Natural Resources

Marine wildlife, wetlands, dunes, coastal prairie

Natural Resources Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Fair	Downward

Natural Resources Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY14
476	476	150	20

Stressors Affecting Natural Resources

Sensitive areas such as wetlands and dunes are being damaged due to unregulated visitor access and a lack of administrative protection. Visitors are also approaching too closely to wildlife such as northern elephant seals. A formal trail system that circumvents sensitive sites and wildlife coupled with interpretive outreach would help protect the natural resources of Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area.

Scientific Value

Research opportunities

Scientific Value Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Good	Stable

Scientific Value Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY14
476	476	200	200

Stressors Affecting Scientific Value

The scientific value of Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area continues to be of importance for research opportunities. The area is internationally recognized as having significant marine habitat and wildlife that provide important information to research institutions. Many long term studies continue each year and new studies that are site specific are permitted.

Educational Value

Interpretation and outreach

Educational Value Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Good	Upward

Educational Value Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY14
476	476	200	40

Stressors Affecting Educational Value

The educational value of Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area continues to be of importance. Interpretation and outreach continue to develop and increase each year. Visitation to the Outstanding Natural Area, particularly the Elephant seal viewing area and the light station increased significantly. School field trips to Piedras Blancas Light Station and the Northern elephant seal viewing area also continue to increase each year.

Recreational Value

Wildlife viewing, sightseeing, hiking

Recreational Value Status and Trend Table

Status of Resource, Object, or Value	Trend
Good	Downward

Recreational Value Inventory, Assessment, Monitoring Table

Acres in Unit	Acres Inventoried	Acres Possessing Object	Acres Monitored in FY14
476	476	476	40

Stressors Affecting Recreational Value

There are many opportunities for recreational use at Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area. The area is a day use area with abundant wildlife viewing and sightseeing found nowhere else along the California coast. Until 2006 most of the land within the current Outstanding Natural Area was in private ownership and the public did not have access to it. Today, with the exception of Piedras Blancas Light Station and some restricted beaches, the public can freely traverse most of the Outstanding Natural Area. However there is not an established trail system and unwanted and unmaintained trails are causing resource damage and diminishing the scenic landscape. Infrastructure such as parking areas and a formalized trail system with appropriate interpretive signage are needed if the quality of the current recreation values is to be maintained. Many visitors would like to visit Piedras Blancas Light Station but only a very small percentage actually does as there is no public access to the facility. The light station was not designed to accommodate vehicles and visitors. Tours are offered on a very restrictive schedule and only a small number of vehicles can be parked on site. The possibility of an adjacent parking area is being investigated.

6 Summary of Performance Measure

There are many factors that contribute to the table below but the main theme is that we are being asked to do more with less. We have increased Visitation while staffing stays the same and volunteerism is declining. Staff is forced to priorities and if something is not on the top of the priority list it is not getting the attention it deserves.

Some of the things that are being neglected are routine maintenance on the facility, maintenance on the grounds including non-native plant removal and monitoring of visitor created trails.

Resources, Objects, and Values Status Summary Table		
Resource, Object, or Value	Status	Trend
Historical Resource	Fair	Declining
Prehistoric Resource	Fair	Declining
Natural Resource	Fair	Declining
Scientific Value	Good	Stable
Educational Value	Good	Improving
Recreational Value	Good	Declining

7 Manager's Letter

The Piedras Blancas Light Station is in the midst of a Transition Phase. Currently we are between Managers and are looking forward to the assignment of the new manager, hopefully in March of 2015. When the new manager takes the reins they will be given the opportunity to put their fingerprint on one of the gems of the California Coast just like the managers of the past have done. The staff and volunteers are eager to embrace the vision and philosophies of the new manager.

The new manager will be tasked with developing the new portion of the California Coastal Trail crossing the Piedras Blancas ONA, figuring out how to handle the increased visitation while protecting the sensitive resources, the transfer of the communication equipment to the replica water tower and developing a water system to supply fresh water to the Light Station. Needless to say they are going to have their hands full. With all that hard work will come the satisfaction that they are protecting a special place for generations to come.

Ryan Cooper
Interim Manager



(NOTE: Managers are welcome to substitute a different back cover format for this one, as long as all of the information listed here is present. [DELETE THIS TEXT])



**NATIONAL
CONSERVATION
LANDS**

Piedras Blancas

Outstanding Natural Area

Phone: 661-927-2968

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Bakersfield Field Office
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January 30, 2015

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